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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies in the reading curriculum that would help underachieving first-grade students meet reading standards by the end of the school year. Subjects, 6 underachieving students, were given the Basic Phonics Skills Test (BPST), the Results high frequency word list, and the Results reading test at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Three strategies and interventions were used: phonics/phonemic awareness instruction, reading in leveled decodable books at least four times a week, and learning the first 100 high frequency words. Parents were also encouraged to participate: students took the decodable books home and read them to their parents. Results indicated that (1) the scores on the BPST correlated with the reading level scores of the students; (2) students who returned their decodable books each day and exchanged them for new books had higher reading scores than those who did not read at home each day; (3) the more high frequency words a student knew, the higher his/her reading level was; (4) parents believed the strategies were key to their child's successful reading development; and (5) students who read at home on a consistent basis showed more of a desire to read independently. An action plan based on these findings includes assessing students' reading progress throughout the year; teaching phonemic awareness; teaching a daily systematic program of phonics instruction; teaching the first 100 high frequency words; using leveled/decodable books; having students take home books; and involve parents in their child's reading development. (RS)

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Collaborative Action Research Summary
How to Help Children Learn to Read

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Collaborative Action Research Report

Claudia Summers

I. Introduction

I conducted my research at Stilwell Elementary School in Seaside Ca. Our school has a very transient population, since the majority of students come from families whose parent(s) are in the military. My class originally had an enrollment of nineteen students. However, as the year progressed I had only 10 of my original students. From those students six were below grade level in reading. It is these 6 students who comprised my study.

The research has shown that those students who don't meet grade level standards in the primary years often are not able to catch up and, as a result, become tomorrow's high school dropouts. My purpose was to initiate specific teaching strategies in the reading curriculum that would help underachieving students meet first grade level reading standards by the end of the school year.

II. **Description of the Research Process**

In August I tested all of my students using the Basic Phonics Skills Test (BPST), the Results high frequency word list, and the Results reading test. I retested my students again in December and April to measure progress. The BPST assessment and high frequency word inventory gave me feedback as to how my students were progressing, and they gave me an indication of where I needed to focus my attention in their instruction to help them meet the first grade reading standard. I learned of these two assessments (BPST and the High Frequency Word Inventory) when I attended the California Reading and Literature Project last summer, July 1999, at CSUMB, Seaside, CA. The other form of assessment I used was the Results reading test, which measured students' reading accuracy and fluency. In addition, I attained valuable data from personal observations and a parent survey.

My theory was that there are three strategies and interventions that contribute to the successful development of reading progression. Those three factors are: phonics/phonemic awareness instruction, reading in leveled decodable books at least four times a week, and learning the first 100 high frequency words If students receive instruction and have consistent practice in these areas, their reading skills will progress significantly. My goal was to have each of my students meet the first grade standards of reading by reaching level 5 or 6 on the Results Reading test by the end of the school year.

The Research Process I Followed:

- At the beginning of the school year all students were taught letter sounds (phonemic awareness) and how to connect the sound to a letter (phonics).

- Students were taught handwriting. When a new letter was taught the corresponding sound was also practiced. This reinforced letter and corresponding sound identification

- Throughout the school year students were taught and drilled on the first 100 high frequency words. Often their spelling words would include these words. I asked the parents to help their child learn these words by working with their child at home.

- Phonics drills were practiced 3-4 times a week using McCracken Spelling and/or John Shelfelbine's systematic phonics approach.

- Students were placed in flexible, leveled reading groups. As students were able to decode they were given more challenging pieces of literature to read. They would usually meet in these leveled reading groups or work with a partner who was at the same level 3-4 times a week for approximately 20 minutes.

- Students had leveled decodable books to take home and read to their parents. When they returned the book with their parent's initials they received another book that matched their reading level.

III. **Analysis of the Data**

The scores of the BPST correlated with the reading level score of the students. Those who were able to decode words and had a sense of phonemic awareness had a higher reading level on the Results Reading test than those who had not yet developed phonemic awareness or the ability to decode words. Another variable contributing to the students' reading level was the amount of daily reading in leveled decodable text at home. Those students who returned their leveled, decodable books each day and exchanged them for new books had a higher reading score than those who did not read at home each day. Finally, the more high frequency words a student knew the higher his/her reading level was.

Another indicator that these three factors worked in harmony was the results of a written survey I administered to the parents. Overwhelmingly, parents felt that the above three factors were a key to their child's successful reading development. In addition, I surveyed the students by asking them to raise their hand if they thought these strategies were helping them

learn to read. Every student raised his/her hand. My conclusion is that there are three inter-related factors that contribute positively to the reading development of children. These three factors are: phonics and phonemic awareness skill development, knowledge of the first 100 high frequency words, and reading in decodable, leveled books.

My colleagues were not surprised by my findings. They wondered which factor had the most effect on the students' reading development. Since I implemented all of them simultaneously I could not factor one out as more important. I explained to them that from my study all three factors-Phonemic Awareness and phonics, being able to read the 100 high frequency words, and daily reading in leveled decodable text--support each other to help students to successfully learn to read. Several of members of my study team plan to use the BPST assessment and teach the high frequency words in their reading programs. Several team members felt that we had an inadequate supply of leveled decodable books so it would be hard to implement this part of the program. We talked about how the school could attain funds to order more decodable, phonics-based books that had interesting content.

A general pattern that developed was that students who had the most support at home, helping them learn and practice the skills of reading, had higher level reading scores than those students who came from homes that were not as supportive. For example, students who brought back their book and had their reading log signed daily proved that their parents were supportive and involved in their learning. Those who did not return their books and signed reading log on a consistent basis did not have the same parental support at home. My conclusion is that the more a parent is involved and supports his/her child's learning the more successful the child will be in his/her reading development. When the child has the personal attention of a caring adult he/she will be more motivated to comprehend and learn the basic skills needed for reading. When the child does not feel supported at home he/she will often lack the motivation to practice and apply the skills taught and used in class. As a result the child does not progress as rapidly. Members of my study team agree that the amount of parental support does effect the child's successful reading development. From their experience they have found the more involved the parent the more successful the child is in his/her learning to read.

Another pattern that surfaced from the data was that students who read at home on a consistent basis showed more of a desire to read independently. Reading was viewed as a pleasurable activity.

IV. **Action Plan**

- Assess students' reading progress throughout the year using the BPST, high frequency inventory, and the Results reading assessment in August, December, and April. By assessing students throughout the year the teacher is able to note student progress and focus on target areas where the student is in need of assistance.

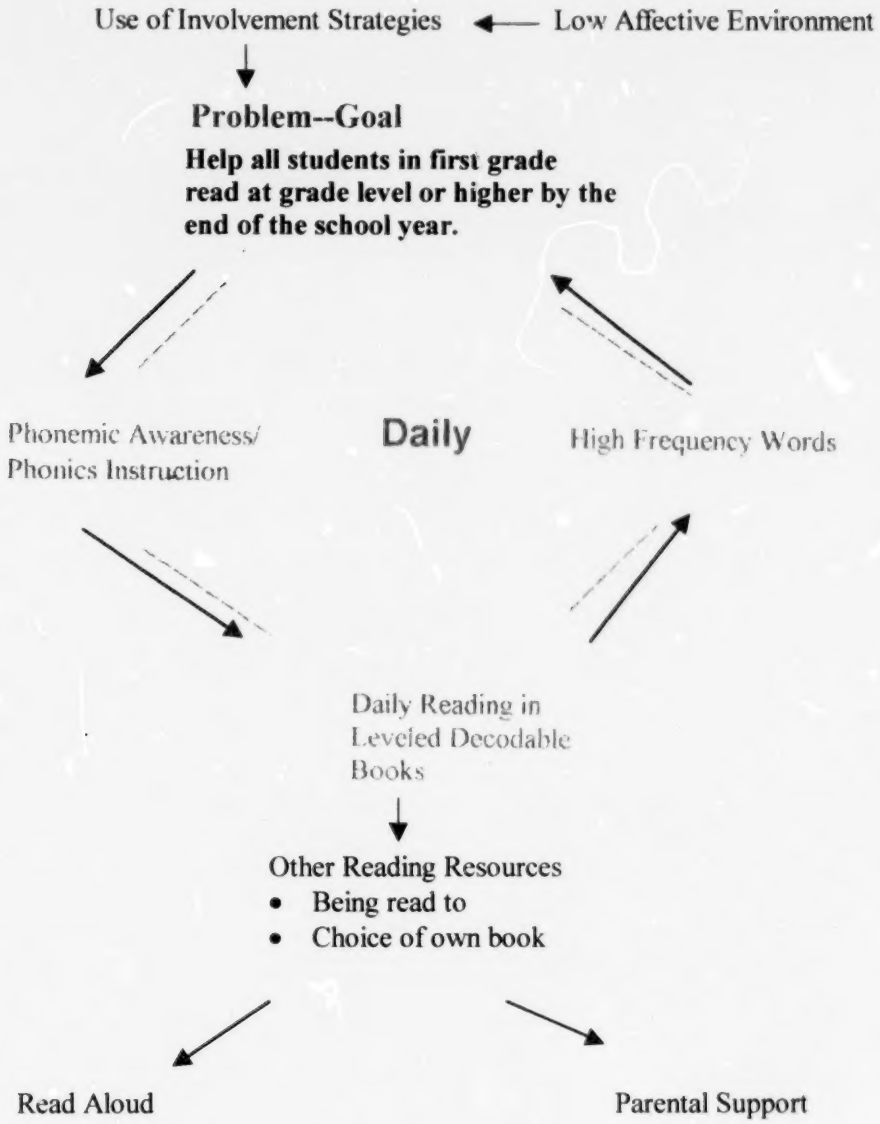
- Teach phonemic awareness using rhymes and fun activities each day for at least 10-15 minutes.
- Teach a daily systematic program of phonics instruction.

- Expect all students to know how to read and write the first 50 high frequency words by Christmas and the second 50 high frequency words by April. To help students achieve this goal give them daily practice through games and drills. Explain to them the reasoning behind the importance of knowing how to read and write these words.
- Help students apply phonetic instruction by providing leveled/decodable books.
- Have students take home-leveled books at least four times a week to help develop accuracy and fluency in their reading.
- Involve parents in their child's reading development. Encourage them to work at home with their child by helping them to learn the high frequency words and listening to them read in leveled decodable books.

Graphic Representation of Proposed Intervention

Information that is under investigation in the research process ---------->

Relationships that are known to exist. ——————>


Use of Involvement Strategies
Low Affective Environment
Problem--Goal
Help all students in first grade read at grade level or higher by the end of the school year.
Phonemic Awareness/ Phonics Instruction
Daily
High Frequency Words
Daily Reading in Leveled Decodable Books
Other Reading Resources
Being read to
Choice of own book
Read Aloud
Parental Support